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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Robert McNamara
The Secretary of Defense
Washington 25, D. C.

SUBJECT: Recall of CIA U-2 Aircraft

1. Reliable photographic coverage of Cuba has held high priority in our national intelligence effort for more than one year now. On June 23, 1963, I directed that two U-2 aircraft be loaned to SAC by the CIA so as to support the regular reconnaissance activity with the most modern U-2 capability, and these aircraft were provided within three days. I felt that the additional performance of the CIA U-2s would provide important insurance against possible MIG-21 or SA-2 counteraction.

2. During this past year, we have learned a good deal about Soviet and Cuban defensive capabilities. It is clear that the SA-2 surface-to-air missile system - - can bring down a lone U-2 unless it is armed with jammers. The SA-2 is equally effective against the SAC and CIA aircraft since the 4,000 ft. altitude differential is irrelevant to the high altitude capability of the SA-2. It is my understanding that SAC has now configured several of its aircraft to carry jammers also, so that there is no real difference in aircraft vulnerability.

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3. Our principal concern at the time of the original transfer was the potential threat posed by the MIG-21 in Cuban hands. This threat has failed to materialize. Furthermore, we have gained intimate knowledge of the MIG-21 by clandestine means and feel that its maximum ceiling capability is 66,000 ft. If the SAC aircraft are flown at the maximum mission altitude of 69,000 ft., this should not represent as much of a threat as the SA-2s which are now passing into Cuban hands.

4. In the meantime, CIA has recently lost one U-2 in China and is running short on other fronts. The Detachment in Southeast Asia has only one U-2 and has no back-up aircraft, save the U-2 which was modified to carry the CORONA triple prime satellite camera in its initial tests over Cuba. Two aircraft are being modified for carrier operations at Lockheed. At the present, I am very concerned that the CIA operations are being stretched far too thin.

5. I believe that it is now time to return the two CIA U-2s presently on loan to SAC for Cuban overflights. If a new threat materializes to the SAC program, we can examine the situation again to see if a second CIA trans- fusion can give us added assurance. In the meantime, it is important to put the worldwide CIA program back on a sound footing with proper aircraft reserves, and I am requesting that the DMRD take immediate steps to insure the return of the two CIA aircraft to Edwards Air Force Base within the next ten days.

JOHN A. MCCONE
Director

cc: Director, NRO

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CONCUR:

/s/ 12 NOV 1963
Jack C. Ledford, Colonel, USAF
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